

Wanted—A Winged Croesus

IF it were not that we need our few dreamers, and the dreamers know it, we might sink deeper into the slough of the practical. If we ever discard our ugly dress, improve our monstrous and uncomfortable theatres, and do away with "commercial art"—mark the phrase!—it will not be because of the practical man of affairs.

These thoughts came to me before I had looked into Gordon Craig's latest book, *The Theater—Advancing*. They are not new, they are as old as the world. They are as obvious as Mr. Craig's own theories, and he is never tired of telling us how obvious he is. But if the quest after beauty, after truth, were as earnestly pursued nowadays as it ought to be there would be no necessity for Mr. Craig.

To understand and to get the best out of *The Theater—Advancing* you must be something of a dreamer. By dreamer I don't mean one who dreams and does nothing else. I mean the man who thinks and uses his imagination out of office hours as well as in.

I suppose there has been more written and said about Craig by those who care for the theatre than about any one else. A great deal of nonsense, and some truth. Craig has of course exposed himself on many occasions to misconstruction, and he is always ready to take up cudgels, not only with those who disagree with him, but with those who talk stupidity even when they are in hearty sympathy with his aims. Craig is not altogether logical nor lucid in his writings. That makes no difference. He inspires. He may not inspire one with a definite idea that one can immediately grasp and carry out—but that again makes no difference. He has been called crazy, illogical, impractical. Well, let us admit it all for the purpose of argument, but add that in his lucid moments he is wise beyond all the rest.

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I am sure Mr. Craig will forgive my quoting a few sentences from his recent letters. They will serve his purpose as well as mine.

Apropos of the book I am now reviewing he writes:

"*The Theater—Advancing* . . . no latest things about it. For so huge a thing as a world theatre to advance *Time* is necessary, time and men and money. We have the first—the second—a few; all these boys promise badly. No, not all, but most of them. They have no *seriousness*. Or they are too *earnest*—'earnest'—too high-brow—too tense. And not real enough as men—not their fault altogether. As for the money—it hides somewhere—and the theatre cannot move without it. It must come as a *Gift, Not as a Loan*. That would lead to a new commercialism. Anyhow, the theatre has been freed to a certain extent—now it must discipline itself."

Gordon Craig has devoted his life to the working out of his theories. His random remarks, a sentence perhaps in a book or an article, have been seized upon by a producer with less imagination and with means of working it out, and the result has been success. Sometimes the producer has given Craig credit for the idea. Oftentimes he has not. Craig has not only given freely to his fellow artists, he has tried for nearly twenty years to work out his ideas in his own way and give the benefit of his experience to the world. For some reason he has been unable to do this. His enemies declare he is impossible to work with; he declares he has not been given a fair chance. Certain it is that his own country has not given him the support he expected.

What Gordon Craig needs, what he has a right to demand, is an endowment so large that he can do what he likes. Let him build twenty theatres and pull them down after they are built. Give him what he asks for: he is a seer, a poet, a prophet. Seriously, give him a million, ten millions, make no conditions. Well, no millionaire will do this: they must see results.

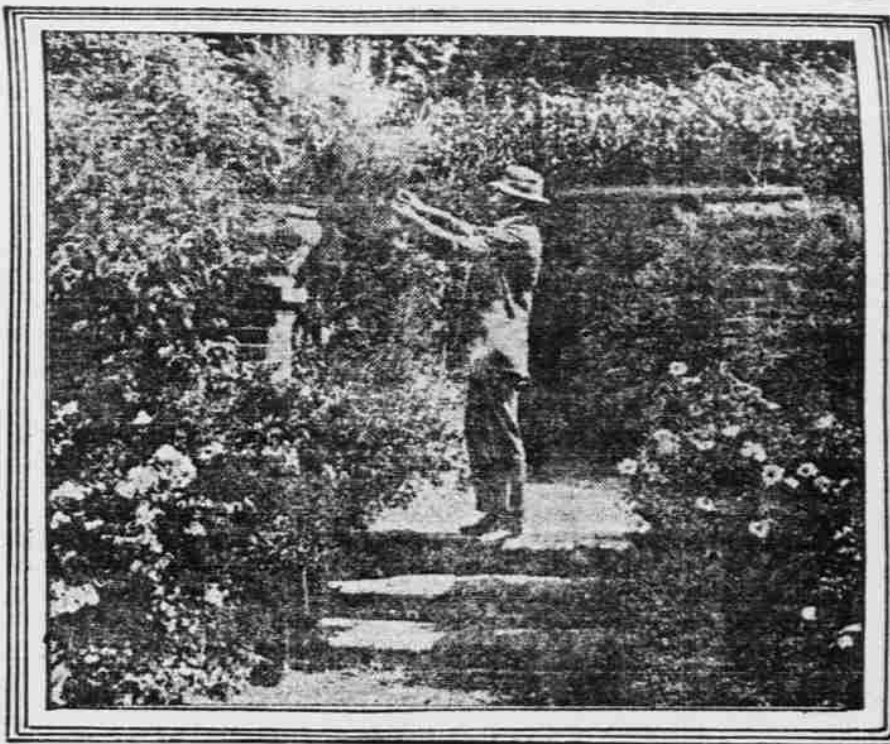
But is Craig to perish from the face of the earth? The Gordon Craig who now lives in Florence may; he may have to reconcile himself to that. It will be bitter, but Craig must know in his heart that he will not have lived in vain. I once tried to impress him with this fact, to tell him that he had already given the world enough inspiration to last it a few centuries. He was naturally not in a mood to receive consolation. He writes first in answer to those who call him "vague":

"*Naturally* I do not draw out plans in detail showing HOW to realize my ideas. Be a good friend and state that I am not so altruistic as all that. With great difficulty I keep my plans and methods to myself—the rogues steal enough as it is—and leave me poorer in purse by their rogueries. I'm glad to give a lot, and I think I have given a lot—but there are limits—what? Can any one with a sense of humor or honesty fail to approve of my 'vague' passages? . . . We all give and should give . . . but you draw the line when bandits ask you to hand over your guns and shot so they may rob you the easier—what? . . . A canon flaged ship going zigzag looks *Vague*—what? What my friends can't see . . . is that this work of mine is deadly grim as grimmest war—they think I am lolling in sunny Italy, dreaming and smiling like a seraph. . . ."

I have quoted enough to show the spirit of the man. "Vague"? Yes; the way great poetry is vague. Baedeker is the antithesis of Craig, but Baedeker is a record of facts, Craig is the revelation of the realm of art, lighted by the imagination.

The Theater—Advancing is a large collection of more or less brief papers on many aspects of the theatre. Between the covers of this book we have a record of Gordon Craig thinking aloud; thought of this sort, all of it straightforward, solid thought, is hard to read. Vague it is to the reader who can not think. To read even a few pages of this book is to think of Craig as I have often thought of him: a giant from whose table occasionally fall a few crumbs. The more "practical" men of the day pick up the crumbs. Craig has so many ideas that it would be necessary to live 500 years to begin to work out. He should be willing to allow others to take his ideas. In this book he says that artists "have nothing that we can flitch quicker than they will offer it to us."

As I read over what I have jotted down it occurs to me that perhaps some inspired millionaire, a man who has grasped what Craig was working toward, will come forth and offer to make possible the



Eden Phillpotts in his garden.

artist's dream. The dreamers—Craig and his millionaire—both practical when the hour of fate sounds, may achieve the impossible, and realize, or begin to realize, a form of beauty in the theatre that only one man has had the power and faith to see.

It is not impossible. But meanwhile let us not despair. Let us not allow Gordon Craig to despair. Is it not worth his

while to have led us part of the way into Canaan? I am sure there are many of us who prefer to live in a world where there are dreams which cannot at once be realized, rather than in one where it is possible on the instant to realize, let us say a railroad station or a factory. B. H. C.

THE THEATER—ADVANCING. By EDWARD GORDON CRAIG. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

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